

# Organisational Exploration of Human Resources - The Ethical Pathway

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**Abstract** : Informed decisions regarding contemporary challenges and development of human resources must be made through the effective execution of intra-exploration. Such engagement, involvement and dialogue would result in enhanced performance. An overview of the principles and practices associated with planning, undertaking and reporting is provided. Related guidelines are propounded, offering frameworks which embrace ethical responsibilities and contain procedures which are underpinned by fundamental theoretical concepts and based upon sound ethics. These must be perceived as a social process, to be carried out with equitable, fair and honest mechanisms in relation to data collected, analysed, communicated and, thence, acted upon.

**Keywords** : Human resources, ethics, management, exploration, research, decision-making, responsibility, stakeholder

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## Introduction

Typically, every organisation is alert to find ways of reducing costs and, hopefully, increase its output and profitability. Thus, within the workplace, it is crucial for management to improve performance and productivity, in both economic and social terms. Motivating the workforce to produce products and deliver services more efficiently and of a high calibre quality would be top priorities. In line with the views of Mestre *et al* (2005), in order to create a pathway to achieve this objective, it is important to recognise that a requisite is to confront the contemporary human resource issues, to have the freedom to face the truth as well as to make situations visible and transparent. These steps have to

become inherent for sustainability with business needing a dramatic shift in thinking, taking it away from production-push and economies of scale towards stakeholder magnetism. They would link day-to-day operations with strategic goals as well as ensure that management decision-making is made with an inclusive approach, looking at both the external and internal stakeholder domains. As to the latter, a major skill required is to get to know every employee in relation to his/her strengths and weaknesses so that potential workplace issues can be addressed and pitfalls prevented. In this regard, it should be acknowledged that the perspectives of ethical principles ought to be constantly to the fore in order to resolve them equitably. What is paramount to bear in mind is that individuals' motivation and performance would actually contribute and make a difference to the bottom line.

To be able to demonstrate awareness, recognise concerns and validate issues, there are many ways how management can show initiative by carrying out exploratory research in relation to human resources. With this approach, it would identify intrinsic and latent problems, aim to focus on the 'correct' solutions as well realise the importance of tacit knowledge which is hidden in employees' minds. Indeed, Argyris (1998) proclaims that, too often, one enters the realm of political correctness, which means that "no one can say what he or she is thinking". That is why transparency of investigation is such a vital ingredient in today's new environment that is sensitive to corporate reputation and image. According to Haw (2004), organisations need to 'talk to their employees'. However, by doing so, it must be accepted that they differ in relation to, firstly, individual characteristics, priorities and needs and, secondly, the situational business conditions. In order to demonstrate appreciation of standards of good organisational research practice, there must be agreement to participation as well as recognition that every investigation embodies potential limitations, be they real or perceived. The process itself of designing and executing systems for acquisition and collation of information is to be evaluated from every angle in order to justify its purpose. This is because inadequacies or failure in this regard could fester 'double-edged sword' adverse effects. As far as Pruzan & Pruzan-Mikkelsen (2007) are concerned, it is important to lead

with wisdom that is based on morality and spirituality. In this context, the aim must appertain to unity of thought and action, with values at the core.

The word ‘research’ is a term somewhat intimidating for many. As far as Sekaran (2003) is concerned, it is simply a process of finding solutions to problems after a thorough study and analysis of the situational factors. In her estimation, managers’ role means constant dedication towards some form of research activity because they are the decision-makers in the workplace. For them, making situations as visible as possible, based on good corporate social responsibility [CSR], will, inevitably, greatly aid the tough ‘umpiring’. Thus, when contemplating this phenomenon, it is necessary to clarify thoughts by examining definition, purpose and methodology of the research, as well as the process itself. A systematic, thorough and methodical procedure would certainly contribute to meaningful knowledge, leading to efficacious decision-making. All too often, the real struggle is not between business and morality but between the different visions of what is perceived as ethical. The moral responsibility in this arena is to explain and find answers accurately and honestly with a view to achieving intended outcomes. Management must sharpen up and search for solutions to keep the workforce within the organisation as motivated and as productive as ever. This makes sense because employees, in general, would like to be part of the ‘family’ of a successful enterprise. Therefore, the overall purpose of any intra-exploration is to contribute to the overall quality of worklife and well-being of the organisation as a whole.

### **The Challenges of Human Resource Management**

According to Schermerhorn (2005), the challenges of human resource management relate to the process of attracting, developing and maintaining a talented and energetic workforce, that is hiring those who would aid the company to achieve its goals and objectives at every level. However, this is no easy feat in such a volatile labour market. The framework proposed by Boxall & Purcell (2007) argues that human resource management is, in the main, concerned with three fundamental aspects of

performance that are, firstly, critical to the firm's viability and, secondly, may lay a basis for sustained competitive advantage. In their opinion, these can be categorised as [1] labour productivity, [2] organisational flexibility, these two reflecting a business-oriented agenda, and [3] social legitimacy, where the organisation confronts related issues within the 'skins' of the organisation and the wider society in which it operates. As such, every organisation ought to invest a considerable amount of time and effort in taking into account its employees' well-being as well as identifying and creating a development strategy by which overall benefits would emerge. As a consequence, performance would inevitably improve and decision-making would be facilitated more effectively through competent processes, clearer understanding, appropriate observation as well as action rather than inertia.

Today, relations between an organisation and its employees calls for a complete re-thinking for both to be winners in the future, ensuring that the potential talent of the latter is unleashed and being used to the full. Seddon (2005) highlights management's failings where 'command and control' is a way of thinking about the design and management of work. In his view, this does not function very well because of the assumption that management knows best. This is an outdated philosophy which, firstly, creates what managers see as people 'problems' and, secondly, wastes resources in relation to management's preoccupation in providing people 'solutions'. Bone & Stainer (2005) affirm that top management has the moral obligation to ensure that capabilities and capacities of individuals are nurtured and should have the resolve to reverse the *in situ* poor management practices. Mestre *et al* (2007) assert that managers have a moral duty to help employees attain a true sense of self-fulfilment. It is felt that the forward-looking proposal is a systems approach which works not only top-down but also down-up and where direct involvement and visibility of facts from high-level management is material; this can be achieved by allocating responsibility and mobilising action. Kim & Mauborgne (2003) call such a process 'breaking through the cognitive hurdle', which relates to putting face-to-face key managers with operational problems so as not to evade reality. The main aspect is to get

back to basics and construct, with agreement, praiseworthy courses of action; these should be continually re-visited so as to gradually build capabilities to achieve desired payoffs which are related to the organisation's mission and vision.

Marr (2006) correctly presumes that human resources are the crucial intangible assets for every organisation as they contribute, with their differing competencies, to the delivery of the value proposition to major stakeholders. Consequently, there is a need to unlock the inherent latent 'people' wealth. In order to triumph in this regard, management ought to always value the importance of establishing good human relations within its working sphere whilst, simultaneously, be aware that employees are complex human beings, coloured by their background or previous experience. Job satisfaction, as the indicator of quality of worklife, represents the human dimensions within the workplace where true respect and fairness are key. For business success, knowledgeable and experienced staff are paramount; as an example, Heskett *et al* (2003) report that the cumulative costs of replacing an experienced automobile salesperson with a novice are estimated to exceed \$300,000 in lost productivity. This highlights the value of training and learning through practice. However, Tithe (2004) states that, in general, the thinking process is deliberately confined to senior management and that employee hidden knowledge is not often noticed nor tapped. Management seems persistently blind to the fact that the reality is that 'local decisions make more sense' – a practical and effective bonding approach.

Initially, common sense and an inquisitive mind by management can bring to light fundamental improvements or areas of attention. All too often, what is missing is a dialogue on role responsibility and business sustainability. By identifying potential trouble-spots, there is a need to take closer look at current practices and apply the 3 Ls of **Listen, Learn, Lead** in order to develop and grow. In other words, to make a difference, management is to engage, challenge, review and adapt in a simplistic rather than a complicated manner with its cardinal stakeholder, the employees. Thus, individuals

would be more willing to find operational solutions and implement required change, achieving over and above what is expected; hence, productivity and high-quality performance would be ameliorated. That is why human relationships are to be underpinned through [1] the level and nature of communication, [2] recognition and [3] kinship with management. The world-class organisation has to build those human bridges by facilitating interaction and dialogue, encouraging participation and rewarding good performance. If management 'gets to know' its employees, they will be easier to guide, supervise and lead; in this way, a sustainable community will be constructed within the organisation.

Human resource management, as claimed by Reilly & Williams (2006), has sought to re-position itself as a strategic organisational contributor. Yet, this management function has failed to give sufficient attention to delivery in relation to added-value, both in economic and societal terms. The main issues that come to the fore are effective skills, operational structures and stakeholder relationships. Hence, the drive is to develop a strategy that looks objectively at management being engaging rather than controlling and where knowledge within the hierarchy is the lubricating power. This would increase efficiency and effectiveness by amalgamating processes and systems with people structures and roles. Mestre *et al* (2007) believe that the necessity for adaptability and the rapidity to change point towards better trained, highly motivated, people effective individuals. In this regard, good quality management should understand the complex dynamics needed to develop today's enterprise as well as be resourceful, innovative and creative. Shri P. Chidambaram (2006), Finance Minister of the Government of India, insists that in order to enhance management's ability to execute decisions and implement changes, new ways of thinking, working, engaging and interacting to build organisations are required to achieve goals. That is why organisations, in whatever industry or sector, as part of their strategic management and direction, ought to move away from the too-narrow view of human resource capabilities.

With such objectives in mind, any business may choose to conduct intra-exploration to ascertain the culture, mood and efficacy on the ground. Such research would be priceless because it would turn gleaned information into gained knowledge that is indispensable for business decision-making and operational processes in the quest of excellence. This crucial value-added phenomenon, combined with value-based leadership, would impact on the future of the business where the culture should align both the values of managers and employees alike, individually and collectively. The real challenge ahead, as Stainer *et al* (2000) believe, is the way in which values are utilised in the overall corporate strategy and accepted by society. Indeed, how people work together is critical and depends upon a commonality of purpose, aspirations and above all values; this is because productivity development is increasingly dependent on co-operation and teamworking.

### **Internal Exploration in Context**

Conducting explorative research within an organisation can be described as a determined effort by management to be enlightened or to investigate issues, be they big or small, simple or complex. Such a process must involve the synergy of common sense with systematic enquiry for making the 'right' decisions and avoiding poor or blundering ones. Knowledge, with careful analysis, helps management to look at the available information in sophisticated and creative ways, determining the salient factors of the dilemma at hand. Indeed, in the norm, managers with knowledge, have an advantage over those without as they would be able to understand and often predict the work environment. However, it is apparent that different organisations have different cultures. As far as Zimmermann *et al* (2007) are concerned, an important facet of managers' tasks is to influence and steer the climate and culture within their organisation so that goals are reached as efficiently and as effectively as possible. In this vein, it would be beneficial if management could identify and be aware of what is at stake. As a manager, the challenge, according to Nichols (1998), is to solicit discussion, debate and negotiation. In this regard, there are key inherent questions that need to be

asked in relation to the planning and on-going processes, even before any exploration is considered [Figure 1] :

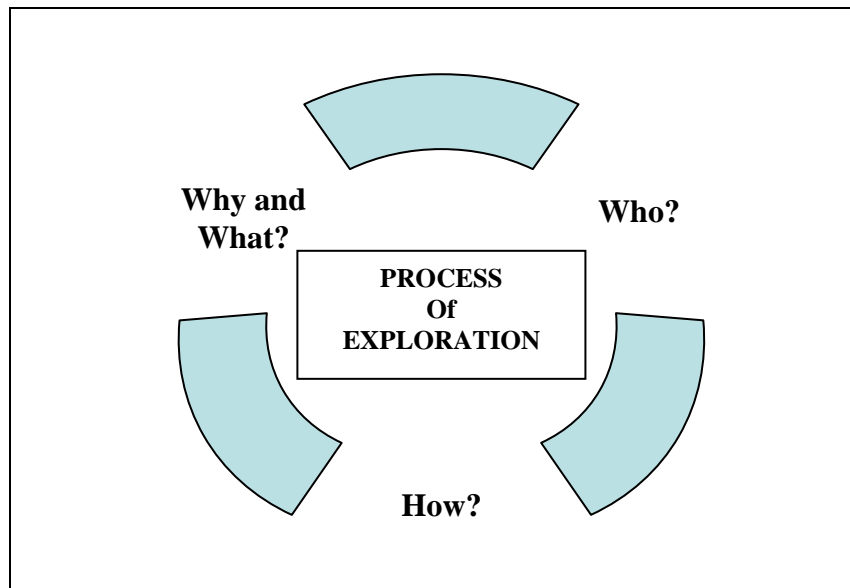


Figure 1. The Process of Exploration

**Why and What?** : Before embarking on such a pathway of research, often perceived as a two-way traffic in both a political and social sense, it is important to justify the objectives for ascertaining information or data. As propounded by Bossidy & Chadran (2002), the intellectual challenge of execution is to get to the heart of an issue through persistent and constructive probing. What is important to remember is whether internal exploration is necessary or is it just carried out for research sake or superficial perception – a damaging route. When ascertaining the research drivers for any issue under investigation, clear reasons ought to be defined, well communicated and transparent and, at the same time, ensuring that there is a balance between costs and benefits. As far as Mullins (2005) is concerned, whether it is in relation to fear, stress, apathy, resentment or lack of purpose, inaction can become a highly-priced luxury. It is apparent, however, that if a research hints at the question ‘Should I conduct this study?’, a moral issue is often at stake. As such, there is a need to pre-empt the ‘intangible’ costs that may be incurred, such as time, effort, anguish and mistrust, as well as the ‘potential’ benefits, such as scientific advancement, increasing understanding as well as productivity and performance improvement.



**Who?** : In the eyes of the employees, researchers, be they internal managers or engaged consultants, should appreciate fully their role and the parameters of their responsibilities, be totally trusted and professional as well as understand to whom they are accountable. They ought to be sensitive to the fundamental ethical issues that may arise in the pursuit of such an activity which could impact, whether positively or negatively, on the individuals who agreed to participate. It must be recognised that there may be circumstances where conflict may occur between the value of the furtherance of knowledge and ethical considerations. Thus, before starting any exploration, it is vital for researchers to analyse themselves, asking such personal questions as :

- How do I communicate?
- Will I accept responsibility to myself, the organisation and the stakeholders?
- Will I avoid bias?
- Do I consider others and/or empathise?
- Am I professional in my approach?

Needless to say, there are both advantages and disadvantages of using internal or external researchers, some obvious and some not so obvious. But it is those who are knowledgeable and qualified about the conduct of research who would be able to interact effectively, be proficient at analysis, determine appropriate solutions or changes as well as convince the business community of the proposed outcomes. Indeed, they should also be objective as well as ensure congruence of the values systems.

**How?** : The most arduous and onerous question is ‘how’. As the overall strategy is, in the main, concerned with gaining access and approaching staff, with least disruption, it is imperative to take into account individuals’ feelings and thoughts. This is because a negative environment is, inevitably, bound to generate unexpected adverse effects, thus decreasing productivity as well as increasing absenteeism and high employee turnover. Cangemi & Miller (2000) state that managers are seriously lacking if they do not take employees’ personal needs into account. As such, competent policies must be employed for target setting, accomplished planning and effective resource

management. These should be framing the issue or problem under investigation and ascertaining what needs to be achieved. Indeed, various ways or options should be considered, assessing potential risks as well as taking into consideration both the legal and ethical elements. In carrying out such an activity, assurance must be given in relation to identity, anonymity and confidentiality to those employees with a stake in the issue. The following must be effectively communicated so as not to ‘topple’ employee morale :

1. Nature and purpose of the investigation should be clearly and comprehensively stated
2. Individuals have the right to refuse participation or withdraw responses
3. A two-way active dialogue should be promoted
4. The way information is collected, stored and analysed
5. Progress is to be reported, be it positive or negative

Moreover, researchers ought to be systematic and organised as well as mindful with regard to [a] the *tools* employed, be they interviews, questionnaires or observation, [b] *sample* identified, especially if it consists of vulnerable groups and [c] *timing* of the operation. Indeed, post research or investigation, quantification and qualification as well as review and monitoring are vital in determining whether objectives have been met and whether there are key elements to be learned. As such, presentation of data and its dissemination should be effected appropriately, simply, without bias and for the purpose intended. Measurement and analysis should be recorded accurately because the transfer of such data onto paper is no easy task as others may not necessarily comprehend what the investigator is thinking, saying or writing. In short, responsibility must be upheld in relation to potential risks that may emanate, be they short-term or long-range.

In today’s business scene, leaders and managers are challenged, as never before, to address a myriad of issues that go far beyond the economic factors, be they crises, dilemmas or incidents. Doubtlessly, the most complex relate to the human resources aspects and such examples of intra-investigation are presented as follows [Figure 2] :

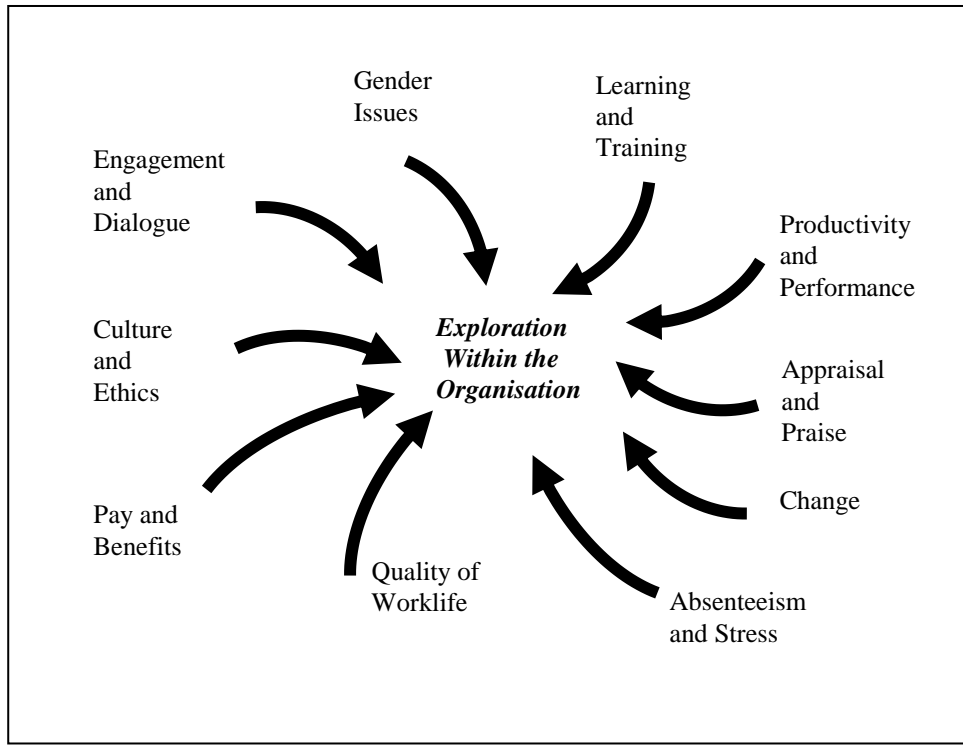


Figure 2. Examples of Exploration within the Organisation

Many of these examples have continuously appeared on the human resource management agenda. In relation to **gender issues**, Hanson (2007) examines what employers can do to keep women from leaving the workplace and why they should bother. As regards, **learning and training**, McCrae (2006) investigates how life-long learning helps organisations overcome human resource problems whilst Marques (2007) stresses that personal and organisational learning are the path to advancement. **Productivity and performance** can be improved, as far as Seddon (2007) is concerned, through a six-step ladder that perceives the organisation as a inter-linking system. Javitch (2006) is convinced that allocating time to undertake **appraisal** of employees is a contribution factor to their success and that of the company and, as Kennedy (2006) affirms, it pays to **praise**, because happy people are more productive and, if this is recognised and rewarded, it is reflected in the bottom line. However, it is felt that **pay and benefits** are not the only reward; indeed, a pat on the back may be more appreciated. This is particularly true in a world of constant **change**, and even though the vast majority of such changes are for the better, Spiers (2006) believes that change is still something that

many can find extremely difficult to contemplate even in such a basic scenario as changing routine behaviour. Therefore, the organisation must find ways to help staff embrace rather than fear the notion of change. Undeniably, management needs to take on board **worklife balance** issues so as to minimise **absenteeism**; cost of absence as reported by the Confederation of British Industry, according to Wigham (2006), amounts to £13 billion per employee per year in the United Kingdom – currently its highest ever level. An aspect is certainly **stress**; Kompier & Cooper (1999) purport that, in a representative study made of European workers, 28% of employees state that stress affects their health and performance at work. Thus, the notion of **engagement and dialogue** with the internal stakeholders would truly create an organisational **culture** which is founded on sound **ethical** principles.

When conducting intra-exploration, practical approaches, based on exemplary corporate conduct, would assist in getting to grips with the multi-faceted business arena. This is to be underpinned by duty of care, commitment, flexibility and effective communication. As Ruskin (2000) affirms : *‘What we think or what we believe is, in the end, of little consequence. The only thing of consequence is what we do’*. Hence, the objective of engaging in organisational research is primarily to be equipped with the necessary knowledge and behaviour with a view to finding equitable inclusive outcomes.

### **The Ethical Scenario**

Ethics can be defined as an inquiry into the nature and grounds of morality, where the term morality is taken to mean moral judgments, standards and rules of conduct. Derived from the Greek ‘ethos’ and Latin ‘moralis’, ethics relate to the application of values to behaviour in every aspect of business conduct. It must be remembered that ethical performance goes far beyond legal requirements. After all, businesses are comprised of individuals, be they rogues, angels or ‘in-between’ and as such possess natural differences in beliefs, values and moral principles. Whether individually or

collectively, they set the moral standards and embody the social parameters regarding such controversial matters as fairness and honesty. Thus, it is important to realise that there will always be a conflict between personal and corporate values as well as short-term and long-term values and these cannot be easily measured! Often, the perception is not so much to have principles but to know how to use them.

Major fundamentals of ethics relate to comporting with professionalism and trust, the latter to be build with confidence and consideration, thus avoiding deception and suspicion. They should include compliance with the law or, indeed, the spirit of the law, with no weak justification for breaking it because of the notion that ‘everybody else does it’. In this vein, respect for the well-being of others through observing basic rights, is to be inculcated when acting in good faith in a fair, factual and honest manner. The concerns are not just about deciphering between ‘right or wrong’, ‘ought or ought not’, ‘good or bad’ but to act with a pro-active level of responsibility. Thus, when dealing with others, it is vital to analyse oneself in relation to perceived rules of ethical conduct [Table 1] :

<b>Perceived Rule</b>	<b>Expected Conduct</b>
Competence	Maintaining it with absolute professional responsibility
Privacy and Informed Consent	Being carried out with protected confidentiality
Objectivity	Being effected in a transparent, open and unbiased manner
Integrity	Ensuring quality of moral self-governance

Table 1. Perceived Rules of Ethical Conduct

Whichever rule or standard is adopted, as far as Webley (2006) is concerned, there is a gap in many organisations between having an ethics policy and its effect on the business decisions and behaviour of employees. It is often a strenuous journey for companies to invest resources in demonstrable ethics programmes which would, ultimately, enhance their reputation and leave them better prepared for a sustainable future.

Theories and schools of thought, according to Boatright (2000), form a basis for beliefs about moral obligations, rights and justice. In order to create ethical awareness when conducting research, there is a plethora of ethical theories and philosophies since the Mesopotamian rulers which should be appreciated and absorbed. The most relevant to such an activity are presented as follows [Table 2] :

Ethical Theory	In Context
Teleology/ Consequentialism	Refers to moral philosophies in which an act is considered morally right or acceptable if it produces some desired result
Deontology/ Duty-based Theory	Refers to moral philosophies that focus on the rights of individual and on the intentions associated with a particular behaviour rather than on its consequences
Relativism	Acknowledges that people have different views and different bases from which to justify decisions as right or wrong

Table 2. Main Ethical Theories

Indeed, the social code of the Chinese, or Confucianism, as a way of life relates to the Golden Rule : Do Unto Others as You Would Have Them Do Unto You – that is to say, treat fairly, tell the truth, respect privacy as well as be impartial. Gensler (1998) believes that the Golden Rule, with roots in a wide range of world cultures, is well suited to be a standard to which different cultures could appeal in trying to resolve conflict – this is especially relevant and true in an era of globalisation. He states that this Rule is best seen as a Consistency Principle as it does not replace regular moral norms; but it is not an infallible guide on which actions can be taken as ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. Another theory is that of Ethical Absolutism, also known as Universalism; it refers to the scenario where an action is unacceptable worldwide – one that is most difficult to justify or indeed apply. Anyhow, in practice, it must be understood that there is much disagreement between the ethical theories in relation to, firstly, their content and, secondly, the results of their application. A tenet that could generally be adopted is that if an action is hateful or distasteful to oneself, the ensuing personal behaviour would be not to act in this manner towards others. When examining guiding principles, consequences of actions may be considered through the Jewish *Mishnah* Ethics of the Fathers 4:2 – “for one positive act leads to

*another positive act and one transgression leads to another transgression*". As Stainer (2005) advocates, it is the underlying knowledge, judgement and wisdom of such theories that may enrich the thought process and, hence, improve the overall decision making process.

Every organisation would enhance greatly its image and reputation, as well as its economic viability, in clarifying its corporate values and looking inwardly at its behaviour. Such a value-based strategy, down through the hierarchy, would embrace the desires and galvanise the moral principles and practices of both internal and external stakeholders. It would also provide a common structure for socially responsible organisations in their analysis of productivity and performance management. As far as Blanchard & O'Connor (1997) are concerned, the foundations of managing by values should evolve as : *Be Ethical, Be Responsive and Be Profitable*. In 'true' management, these three attitudes would endorse the view that there is only one boss : the company's values. Such a stance would enhance loyalty towards the organisation, breed self-respect and appreciation from peers as well encourage creativity and self-development. In short, the organisation needs to identify, articulate, modify as well as understand [i] its overall operational requirements, [ii] where and why differences may occur and [3] whether its values are established within its 'local' moral framework in order to deliver reduced risk of unacceptable decisions. Cascaded down, as Marr (2006) propounds, value must be underpinned by a shared understanding of the strategy which, in turn, would help create a common purpose, a shared identity and a sense of community. To become world class, such an interplay is sure to provide genuine cross-fertilisation throughout the hierarchy.

### **The Ethical Dimensions of Internal Exploration**

The vision of every organisation should relate to a policy that provides a balance between inputs, process and output measures, that is structure, systems, staff and skills, as well as shared values. The real challenge ahead is the way in which values are utilised in the overall corporate strategy and accepted by the wider society. Businesses must strive to be leading players in the moral internal

community whilst pursuing the triple bottom line of enhanced economic, social and environmental values. The ethical temperature is to be monitored and decisions must be taken to reflect a strategic philosophy which incorporates the balancing act between stakeholder expectations and competitive advantage. Of course, the latter would be achieved through reconnecting with employees and using the necessary social tools to try improve the work environment and unlock latent potential; otherwise, without discussion, debate and action, there could well be paralysis. Mullins (2005) states that the current inertia in management decision-making can only lead to increased expense and individual demoralisation, to be ultimately linked to reduced competitiveness. Thus, a framework is proposed that could gain cutting-edge knowledge [Figure 3]. Developed from that proposed by Gully *et al* (2006), it fundamentally examines the various moderating influences in relation to making decisions when carrying intra-investigation.

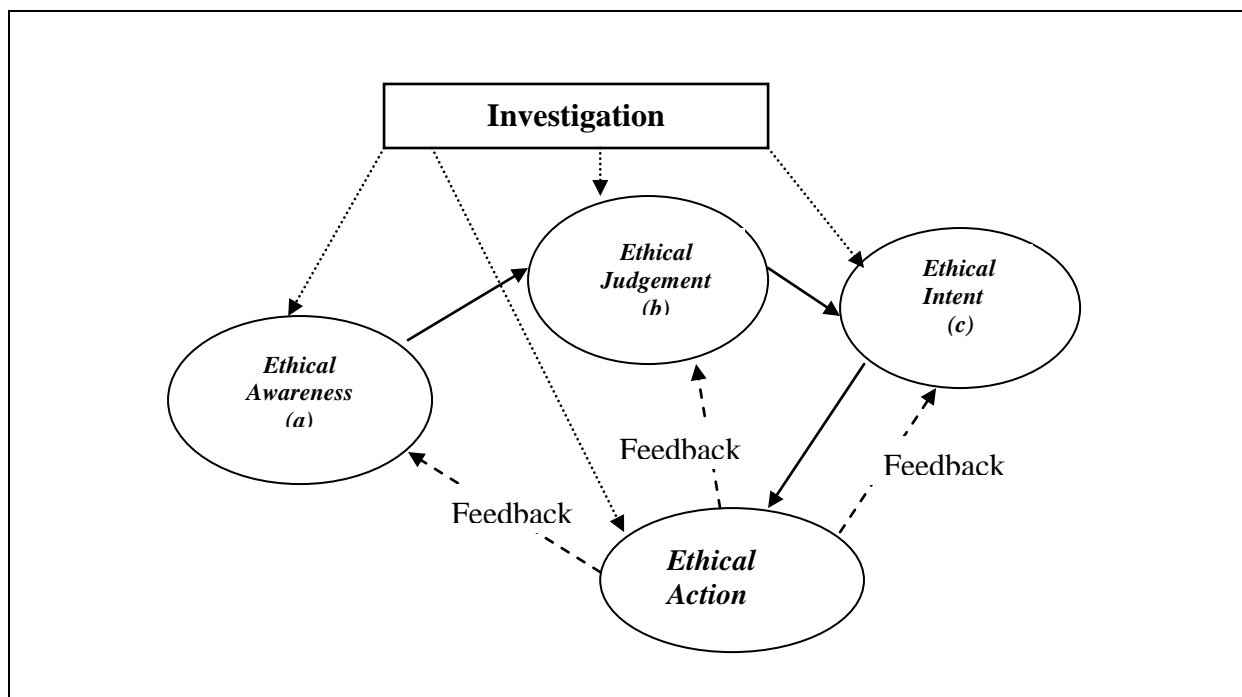


Figure 3. A Framework of Ethical Decision Making  
For Intra-Investigation

As can be seen, it is all-embracing in that it systematically and markedly deliberates on the issues of [a] ethical awareness, [b] ethical judgement and [c] ethical intent, culminating into ethical action. The essential element is feedback which is carried out, not only as a learning curve, but also as an



assessment of success or, indeed, failure. As any other management tool, the framework is not, by all means, perfect or unique but it generates the salient ethical thought process. The inter-relationship of the elements would initiate a building block for good ethical business decision-making practice when carrying out investigative research.

According to Blumberg *et al* (2005), the researcher has the responsibility to find the middle ground between being completely code-governed and ethical relativism, the foundation of which is an emerging consensus on ethical standards. In this regard, Bryman & Bell (2003) state that, while codes and guidelines provide some direction, their potency is ambiguous and often leaves the door open for some autonomy in dealing with ethical issues. Consequently, there are three basic questions of ethics to bear in mind, scrutinise and explore in order for them to be interlinked to achieve successful ethical outcomes [Figure 4] :

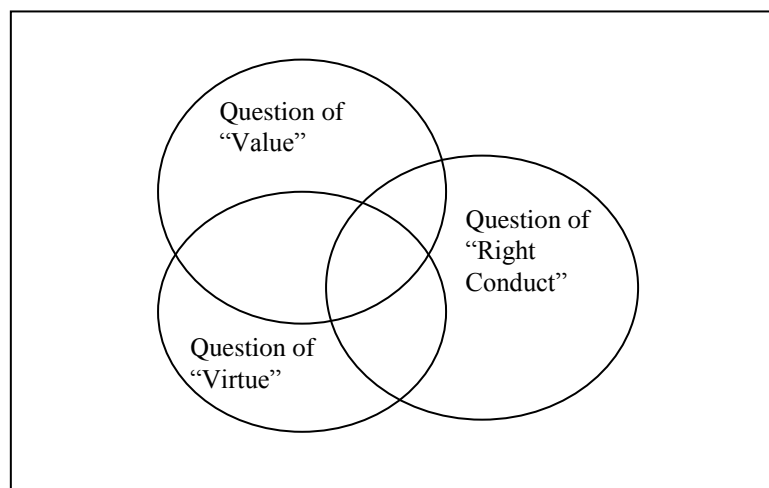


Figure 4. Three Basic Questions of Ethics

The question of "Value" relates to the notion whether individuals should establish what they value or set norms, taking into account that ethics and morality are related to value. The question of "Virtue" or "Moral Character" is important in ethical theory as it is not just the action but the intention and motive behind the decision. The question of "Right Conduct" is central in that judgements are all about the moral worth of an action taken. In viewing these questions, the synergetic kinship is the

fusion between morality, responsibility and decision-making. However, if in doubt, the intuitive reaction ought to be to say ‘no’ but there is no harm in seeking further advice.

The rationale to think about ethics when conducting an investigation is multi-fold. These include : [1] growing distrust of business, [2] scepticism of process, [3] cynicism in relation to the consequent presentation or misrepresentation of results – or indeed their misuse, [4] greater volume of research, thus overwhelming participants and [5] the ethics gap between how researchers see their responsibility and what respondents both perceive and expect in such an exercise. In relation to the latter, the ‘right’ and effective communication should embrace :

- researchers’ responsibilities : creating a mutual bond of honesty, without coercion, abuse, offence or emotional stress, but with trust and respect; providing full and transparent explanations as well as honouring requests; anticipating adverse effects, as well as ensuring responsibility to the organisation; making moral judgements about the suitability of research methods; acting in a professional manner whilst adhering to codes of conduct, avoiding undue intrusion in participants’ lives
- respondents’ responsibilities : listening attentively so as to understand the issues presented; asking questions of concern and providing informed responses; feeling empowered to contribute; being punctual and taking the operation seriously and in the spirit intended; co-operating in a genuine mode of conduct; creating also a mutual bond of honesty; being unambiguous and truthful

When anticipating internal exploration, the organisation should establish its goals and objectives as well as formulate its policies and actions. Whilst managing it, there are certain factors that mark success, especially those moral issues related to leadership, openness and commitment. Consequently, the challenges can be better understood by utilising a three-stage model in this regard, that is **before, during** and **after** the research process :

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>Before</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- warn of impending research so that employees get used to the notion</li><li>- timing is all important</li><li>- explain reasons for and structure of the study</li><li>- need for the study must be perceived by <b>all</b> concerned</li><li>- there is acceptability if more people are involved</li><li>- communication must be precise and unambiguous</li><li>- ensure employees are aware of the benefits</li></ul> |
| <b>During</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- ensure effective communication</li></ul>  |

- listen and help with problems encountered
- minimise interference
- avoid manipulation or put participants at risk
- continuously monitor the study
- be tolerant and supportive
- encourage employee contribution

**After**

- ensure feedback communication
- action must be taken as a result of the investigation
- show that employees are valued and appreciated
- praise employee engagement
- develop a climate of acceptability
- encourage employee/team participation for future projects

By following these steps, the thrust is to ensure good ethical practice. This can be achieved through interaction, involvement, innovation and continuous drive to improve the way an organisation operates. It is vital to appreciate that any intra-exploration can generate both positive and/or negative impacts on all individuals concerned but malpractice has the potential to inflict enormous harm within the work environment. According to Gully *et al* (2006), explicit diagnosis and ethical initiatives must be driven to put principles, whether economic or moral, into practice, these to be weaved into the fabric of excellence.

To operate in its own best interests, an organisation needs to show enthusiasm in accepting responsibility for its actions, thus building and nurturing its good image and sustainable reputation. The sense of enjoying a 'special' relationship with employees, with workable agreements in achieving goals, must be at the fore for in-depth strength to formulate a 'firm' grounding and a rich seam of human capital. An integrated approach to intra-exploration must be seen as an advancement in getting to know staff and unearthing the 'right' solutions. It is felt that employee strengths should equate business advantage, displaying ingredients for growth and commitment as well as increasing productivity and efficiency. After all, employees, considered as ambassadors for the organisation, ought to be perceived as the 'fuel' of the business's future and should, thus, be conserved and respected.

## Conclusion

The integration of planning, risk and performance management is a task that many businesses fail to achieve if they do not esteem the importance of their human resources. As such, strategy ought not be confined to top level management but should be inherent in the day-to-day processes. Today, business, in order to genuinely present itself more and more in terms of social responsibility, should translate the outcomes of research into policy and practice to affirm that employees are accepted as crucial internal stakeholders. Hard-earned improvements in this direction would quickly slip away if appropriate measures are not put into place. Yet, Pinnington *et al* (2007) stress that human resource management practice continues to affirm its significance for corporate profitability and prefers to distance itself from its traditional welfare image, showing limited interest in business ethics. This behaviour must change because what was acceptable in the past is not acceptable in contemporary society. Employing values in a such a globalised and competitive environment is the way forward so as to develop a culture that embraces, supports and enacts ethical initiatives and practices in a consistent manner.

It is not just business methodologies and procedures that drive success but the underlying inherent values that are at the heart of that success. As Gallagher (2003) purports, this is because they are the most strategic competitive factor in the current market place where good labour standards and relations contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability. There is no doubt that resolving contemporary ethical dilemmas, especially in the field of human relations, is highly intricate and complex. This is due to the fact, according to Kidder (1996), that ethical issues can arise in the least suspecting moments. He believes that good managers have to make tough choices and that there exists three basic ways to be 'wrong' : [a] violation of the law, [b] deviation from moral rectitude and, above all, [c] departure from the truth. As far as Murray (1997) is concerned, truth has to be one of the seven core principles of business integrity, along with consideration, creativity, interdependence, justice, service and stewardship. It must be stressed that moral autonomy must be a

major philosophy for management where individual characteristics and organisational contexts are key for the understanding of ethics-related attitudes and behaviour. Understanding the ethical fundamental aesthetics would greatly assist in the getting to grips with complexity by narrowing and defining problems as well as developing mechanisms that would produce fresh outlooks and perspectives.

There is an argument to be made that management can become ensnared in the ‘continuous improvements’ syndrome. Because of such a stance, it is even more important to touch ‘base’; in the words of Niels Due Jensen (2007), Group Chairman of Danish Grundfos Management, this should be to lead with compassion and responsibility and emphasise the notions of openness and honesty. In this scenario, the relevance of internal investigation and dynamic engagement cannot be undermined and, as Coleman (2007) states, if management needs ideas, it should ask its staff. That is why the outcomes of intra-explorative research are, indeed, not the end but the beginning of a relationship of knowledge-building continually benefiting both the organisation and the employee. They need to be exposed in a constructive and straightforward manner, expounded and acted upon; in this way, they would provide the opportunity to advance rather than be buried in the ‘good old ways’. In such a context, management needs to be bold and brave to formulate a practical outlook to bind kinship with employees. The feedback from investigation is to be inculcated within that strategy to address the challenges that have emanated.

The learning curve is to face situations encountered by ‘talking’ and ‘listening’ before actions are taken. In this regard, Rosen *et al* (2005) present a case study which features the Bounce Tree of Sustainability, where one of its branches relates to people and learning; the underlying thrust is to communicate with employees in order to promote the culture of a learning organisation and to use that culture for the redesigning of processes and the development of safe sustainable systems. The view must be, therefore, to ensure that all efforts to be socially responsible are made. However, there

are no simple rules, not one size fits all and, certainly, there are no moral experts. Organisations need to keep up an 'ethical standard', be robust in their moral thinking and propound 'timeless values' in order to help preserve and maintain respect and integrity where values should be perceived as the 'glue' that holds the organisation together. It seems that social expectations and ethical issues are inescapable. Thus, undeniably, the ethical pathway is to improve equitable decision-making in the complex business arena through engagement with employees. This is because : no involvement equates with no commitment. Business is all about creating an environment for winning the confidence of, and understanding of, its people. It is only subsequently that companies can create and implement a road map to achieve high organisational performance.

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